Soutron Supports Student Activism and Social Engagement

OXFORD HUB CHOOSE SOUTRON FOR LIBRARY MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

CHALLENGE

Oxford Hub is run by and for the benefit of students, The Oxford Hub is a branch of the national Student Hubs network, a research and learning resource for students interested in social and environmental issues.

Established in 2007, the Oxford Hub supports student-run community volunteering, fundraising and activism, helps students find careers in the third sector, provides training and conferences and presents speaker series.

The library is a recent and important addition to the Hub, focusing on, and underpinning, the learning component of volunteering, fundraising and activism.

Library acquisitions to date have been a combination of donations and the purchase of books and resources made possible by grant funding. With a growing catalogue, the Oxford Hub needed to make these resources easily accessible to students.

A summer intern was responsible for specifying and recommending a cost-effective library system which would:

• be simple to implement
• place minimal demands on volunteer student librarians
• be accessible online and easy for visitors to use
• be flexible enough to grow with the library space and resources

Although at the outset, needs would be basic i.e. an online catalogue, check out/in facility and comprehensive archive, ideally, the system would also have the capacity to evolve in response to emerging library user needs.

SOLUTION

After considering several potential providers, the Oxford Hub chose Soutron's web-based library management system, which requires no hardware investment or capital expenditure and does not rely on internal IT support. These factors ensure that available funds can be invested in library resources rather than systems and support.

The system is extremely intuitive and, despite its simplicity, delivers a sophisticated automated library which releases volunteer student librarians from repetitive administrative tasks. And, because it is web-based, the volunteer librarians do not have to be physically on-site, so are able to make the best use of the time they have available to devote to running the library.

The installation was completed in less than one week and basic training saw newly recruited librarians Sandra Zuniga Guzman and Lauren Kutler quickly up and running.

Sandra told us that "As well as freely sharing technical knowledge and advice, Soutron stood out for their commitment to community involvement and a willingness to support the Hub's work and vision. Soutron's staff were incredibly professional and helpful from the outset and continue to offer encouragement."

RESULTS

Soutron's automated system means the library is extremely easy to manage and because Soutron hosts the system and data, in the event of difficulties, the help desk can provide remote support at any time.

The volunteer librarians use Soutron's database and reporting system to monitor the whereabouts of resources and keep in touch with users to remind them to return loans.

This approach has been so successful that, in keeping with the library's ethos of making resources easily accessible, The Oxford Hub library eschews a fines culture, preferring to maintain a close relationship with library users.

Users themselves appreciate Soutron's easy-to-use self-service check out system, remote access to the catalogue and ability to manage their library accounts at their convenience, as well as the facility to request and renew items online.

They have also discovered a unique benefit, as Lauren explains "One of the best things about the library is that, by using Soutron's database and reporting system to monitor resources, we can allow even books which would usually be reference-only, to be checked-out."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Having completed the major task of getting all resources entered and classified in the system, the volunteer librarians can now begin to work on a library wish list to ensure that the collection reflects the interests of their engaged and active users.

And, although there was previously no model for a hub library, the experience of the Oxford team will now be used by Cambridge which is just beginning to build its own library.